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Dear Friend,

Throughout my work in Congress, I have never once forgotten that this nation owes its strong history and promising future to the work and commitment of our brave servicemen and women. In return for the sacrifices and life-and-death struggles they endure everyday, our government must at least ensure that our veterans receive excellent care and transition assistance at their homecoming. Our veterans have made protecting American lives and interests their first priority. It is only fitting that we, in turn, make their well-being a national priority.

Recently, I testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health in support of legislation I have sponsored, H.R. 3441, that would automatically enroll veterans already eligible for free five-year health care in the VA medical system within 45 days of leaving the Armed Services. Unfortunately, we still have a system that doesn't sufficiently reach all soldiers. It currently requires soldiers who have just returned from war to navigate the bureaucracy of signing up for veterans' benefits. Dealing with returning to their "normal" lives presents its own challenges following their return. We shouldn't place another burden on our veterans by requiring them to jump through unnecessary hoops to get the care they deserve and may need.

The idea for this important legislation came about after discussing the issue at a recent meeting of my Veterans Advisory Committee. It has been endorsed by the American Legion and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), and has the support of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Bob Filner.

H.R. 3411 does the following:

- Automatically enrolls veterans who are already eligible for free VA health care (veterans who served in a combat theater of operations after November 11, 1998);
- Requires the Defense Department and Department of Veterans Affairs to work together to most effectively achieve a seamless transition for returning soldiers;
- Issues a standard VA veterans' identification card (VIC) to enrolled veterans and provides a listing of VA medical facilities within 100 miles of the veteran, as well as a description of federal veterans benefits and programs (educational benefits, job training, and placement programs) for which the veteran may be eligible; and,

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- Provides two opt-out opportunities – one at the time of separation, and another six months after separation – if the veteran prefers another form of health coverage in order to preserve an individual's right to choose his/her health plan.



Watch Congressman Arcuri's testimony on H.R. 3411 before the House Veteran's Affairs Subcommittee on Health.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfotXPTGcal>

Last year, I joined a bi-partisan coalition in Congress to pass legislation that expanded GI Bill benefits for veterans and their families. This historic legislation restored full, four-year college scholarships to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to help make them part of an economic recovery like the veterans of World War II.

Since enrollment opened on May 1, 2009, more than 27,500 students have received benefits for housing or books, or their schools have received their tuition payments. Although the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has been working to get every enrolled veteran their benefits, many of them have not received them to date because of a backlog in the VA's enrollment system.

In response, the VA has authorized emergency checks for up to \$3,000 to be sent to veterans to bridge the gap between the start of the school year and their enrollment into the education benefits program.

Starting Friday, Oct. 2, 2009, students can go to one of VA's 57 regional benefit offices with a photo ID and a course schedule to request advance payment of their education benefits. Because not all these offices are located near students, VA expects to send representatives to schools with large Veteran-student bodies and work with Veteran Service Organizations to help students with transportation needs.

A list of those VA regional offices is available at www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/offices.asp.

Additionally, my office can serve as a primary resource for returning veterans. If you have questions about federal benefits, or are experiencing trouble receiving them, please contact my Utica, NY Office at 315-793-8146 or http://arcuri.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=704&catid=41&Itemid=104 for information on how to submit constituent casework to our office.

Sincerely;

MICHAEL ARCURI
Member of Congress

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If you wish to contact me, please do so at <http://arcuri.house.gov>. Please do NOT reply to this message.

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